

**Drasha / Sermon Shabbos Nachamu "The Whole is Greater Than the Sum of its Parts"
Rabbi Ze'ev Smason, NHBZ 1-aug-2015**

Bob Andrews is a handsome, thickly built, outrageously fit 70 year-old. Maybe 5-10 and 175, Bob typically wears big, black Ray-Bans and has bangs that sweep across his forehead. He's open, funny, and completely unafraid of life, and enjoys a good game of golf. With a 30 handicap, Bob Andrews may sound like an average golfer.

Until you learn that Bob Andrews is blind.

Bob lost his eyesight on a June morning in 1967 on a Marine Corps patrol in Vietnam. He was walking along a river about 25 yards behind a rookie sergeant, and his last thought was, "That (so-and-so) is walking down the path!" Walking down a trodden path in Vietnam was like walking down the middle of Highway 40 at rush hour. The sergeant tripped a wire that sent two hand grenades swinging out to Bob Andrew's feet. By all rights he should have been dead, but another sergeant got him, carried him over his shoulder -- Forrest Gump style -- to a clearing, where he was Medevac'ed to a field hospital.

Bob was unconscious for over two months. He had twenty-nine operations on his eyes, face and knees. A Catholic, Bob was given Last Rites three times. When he came home to the States, his mother called Bob's 21-year-old girlfriend, Tina, and said, "Don't bother coming to see him, honey. He's not going to wake up."

Tina went anyway. She sat in a rocking chair and didn't move for 3 days. "I had to," she says. "My whole life was lying in that bed." Together with his parents, Tina nursed him back to life. Of course, there were times when Bob wished they hadn't. "I can't see!" he cried. "What can I do?" Tina challenged Bob's thinking; if he were to think in team terms – he and Tina together – the limits would vanish. "Look," Tina assured him, "we're two people. We're a team. We can do anything we want!" Bob and Tina got married within two months of his initial recovery.

How does a blind person play golf? By being part of a team.

Blind golfers have a sighted coach who helps the golfer in describing distance, direction and characteristics of the hole. The coach then picks out a club and helps line up the club behind the ball before the swing or putt. From that point on, the blind golfer is on his own. Tina is Bob's coach. She picks out the right club, and gets the right distance to the hole. Then she lines up her husband's shoulders and hips, and gets his hands the right length away from his body. On every shot.

It turns out that Bob and Tina are a pretty good team. Bob has won regional blind golf tournaments, been a consistent top finisher in international events -- and in 2009 won the National Championship blind golf title.

Like all good teams, partnerships and marriages, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

This idea is true for relationships, and a highly relevant thought on *Shabbos Nachamu* (the Shabbos of comfort and consolation) and Tu B'Av, the 15th day of the month of Av.

You may be unfamiliar with Tu B'Av. But it's a day that's worthwhile getting to know! The Talmud says:

**Drasha / Sermon Shabbos Nachamu "The Whole is Greater Than the Sum of its Parts"
Rabbi Ze'ev Smason, NHBZ 1-aug-2015**

There was never in Israel greater days of joy than the 15th of Av and the Yom Kippur.

Tu B'Av must be important if mentioned in the same breath as Yom Kippur. The Israeli media sometimes refers to Tu B'Av as 'Jewish Valentine's Day.' Jewish Valentines Day? That's a bit like calling Purim 'Jewish Halloween.' However, in times of the Temple, on the 15th of Av the young unmarried women of Jerusalem would go to the vineyards in search for a suitable husband.

Jewish tradition emphasizes that what makes a good marriage partner is not perfection, but the ability to see the good and enable the strengths of one person to complement the weaknesses of the other. That way, *the whole becomes greater than the sum of its parts.*

On the 15th of Av, the Talmud says that young men were directed "to lift up your eyes and see." To see what? To see a young woman's positive qualities. No young woman claimed perfection. But the reality is that despite the faults that every person has, a young man should raise himself up to see more deeply; to see a young woman's depth and beauty despite her imperfections.

It is the beauty of the Jewish calendar that the joyous festival of Tu B'Av comes fast on the heels of Tisha B'Av, the saddest day of our calendar - six days, to be exact. What's the connection between Tisha B'Av -- a day of mourning -- and Tu B'Av -- a day of great joy?

The ability to rebound after darkness and disaster is dependent on our ability to see light and hope. In the days of consolation following Tisha B'Av, Hashem comforts us: *Nachamu, nachamu*. But we accept as a Torah concept that G-d helps those who help themselves. Therefore, to the extent we spread light and hope in comforting others, we make ourselves deserving of an extra measure of Divine comfort.

Rav Yechiel Yaakovson, an Israeli educator, recalled the time he was walking down a Bayit Vegan street as part of a group of students with the renowned scholar Rav Chatzkel Abramsky. Suddenly, something caught Rav Abramsky's attention. He walked to a small courtyard and approached a young girl who was crying.

"Why are you crying?" he asked.

"Because my friend said that my dress is ugly," the girl replied.

Rav Abramsky smiled and said, "Well, you go tell your friend that a big *rov* is also your friend, and he said that the dress is beautiful."

As the beaming girl headed off, Rav Abramsky shared an insight with his students. He quoted the verse which says, "*Umachah Hashem dimah mei'al kol ponim.*" He explained that the verse states that G-d will wipe the tears off of every Jewish face. "Now, if every Jew is precious enough to Hashem that He takes the time to wipe the tears off of every face," he said, "then we also have to do our part to erase *Yiddishe trerren* -- Jewish tears."

**Drasha / Sermon Shabbos Nachamu "The Whole is Greater Than the Sum of its Parts"
Rabbi Ze'ev Smason, NHBZ 1-aug-2015**

When those who are strong and secure show those who are weak and vulnerable that not only their dresses are beautiful, but that their souls are beautiful, collectively we become so much greater.

Another way in which our whole becomes greater than the sum of our parts is when we show others their capabilities far beyond what they, themselves, can imagine.

Last week, thousands traveled to Lakewood, NJ, to mourn the passing of Rebbetzin Rischel Kotler *a"h*. Rebbitzin Kotlar, widow of Lakewood Rosh HaYeshiva Schneur Kotlar, *z"l*, was a woman of greatness and stature. At the shiva many shared Inspiring and deeply moving stories about the Rebbitzin that had a similar theme. The Rebbetzin, an heir to the greatness of Kelm and Slabodka (from where she came), raised the level of all who came in contact with her.

One day, the Rebbetzin saw a young married yeshiva man shuffling down the street, his face looking downward. She offered him pointed advice. "If you look down, you'll see pennies," she told him, "so why not look up and find dollar bills?"

She was an effective counselor for young couples, realizing early on that a community filled with young marrieds needs someone with a listening ear, who can provide the guidance and support of a wise friend. She became that friend, helping many families through difficult moments.

A husband came to her complaining of the *shalom bayis* (marital peace) situation in his home. She quickly diagnosed the problem. "Have you been to your *rebbe* to discuss your problem?"

"Yes."

"Have you been to your *rosh yeshiva*?"

"Yes."

"Have you told your *chavrusah* (study partner)?"

"Yes."

"And everyone has *rachmonus* (compassion) on you, right?"

"Yes."

"And you have *rachmonus* on yourself?"

"Yes."

"And your wife also has *rachmonus* on you?"

"Yes."

"Stop being a *nebachel*, looking for people to have *rachmonus* on you," said the *Rebbetzin*. "Pull yourself together. Carry yourself like a *choshuve* (important, dignified) person. Buy your wife a gift. Behave with greatness and everything will work out."

**Drasha / Sermon Shabbos Nachamu "The Whole is Greater Than the Sum of its Parts"
Rabbi Ze'ev Smason, NHBZ 1-aug-2015**

And it did.

Our every act and word can serve the purpose of strengthening and comforting others. King Solomon said it this way: *"Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work; If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up."* (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10) When we support others, we magnify by multiples the comfort and support that Hashem shows us.

In the depth of his despair and depression, Bob Andrews was told by his wife, Tina, "Look, we're two people. We're a team. We can do anything we want!"

Since then, they practically have -- and not just having become a great golf team. Bob and Tina embarked on a life more active than most couples could imagine. Together, they have a business. Bob is a building contractor(!). They have three sons, they sail, they fish, they body surf, and, yes, they still golf.

What's the secret to their happiness? Tom Sullivan, a blind actor, gives a clue:

"Every blind person is told at first that he's going to be dependent on others his whole life, and so they react wildly. They do anything they can to be independent. You know, stuff to prove to the world that they don't need them, but it only makes them unhappier. Eventually, through love, they recognize that the only way to be happy and at peace is to live interdependently, to live knowing that they need others and others need them. And that's what blind golf is, a symbol of that lesson. The notion that we all need each other, blind or sighted."

Author and sports columnist Rick Reilly's own reflections about the Andrews are equally touching:

"I saw then what a great team they had become -- the broken soldier and the lost girlfriend. They were so much greater than the sum of their parts."

At the conclusion of Tisha B'Av, we recite a prayer that tells us that G-d will rebuild the walls of Jerusalem and the Temple with 'walls of fire'. Those walls, the mystics tell us, are currently being built by the sparks of the fire that those who love G-d create through their mitzvos. And the holiest sparks are those created through acts of love, comfort and support of others.

May G-d comfort us today and in the weeks ahead. If we could only think in 'team terms' -- our limitations would vanish. And may we live with the reality that the whole -- of the Jewish people, and of humanity -- is greater than the sum of its parts.